



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **22 ARRESTED AND CHARGED WITH MARRIAGE FRAUD**

***ICE investigation results in the arrest of 13 U.S. citizens and 9 Kenyans; more arrests expected***

DES MOINES, Iowa—U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents arrested 22 U.S. citizens and Kenyans here today who were subsequently arraigned in federal court for allegedly participating in marriage fraud schemes designed to evade U.S. immigration laws.

The arrests and criminal charges were announced at a news conference this afternoon held by U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Iowa, Matthew G. Whitaker, with the participation of ICE Special Agent-in-Charge Mark Cangemi and ICE Resident Agent-in-Charge Estela Biesemeyer.

“A priority for ICE is to identify vulnerabilities in our legal immigration system and shut them down,” said Cangemi. “We will not allow America’s generosity to be abused by those who try to manipulate the system for criminal purposes.”

According to indictments filed in federal court, participants in the sham relationships married only so that the Kenyan nationals involved could obtain permanent resident status, commonly referred to as having a “green card.” In return, the U.S. citizens were paid for entering into the fraudulent marriages.

ICE Des Moines Resident Agent-in-Charge Estela Biesemeyer said her office began investigating about three years ago into a loosely affiliated group that includes those arrested today. Allegedly, U.S. citizens who agreed to enter a sham marriage received between \$250 and \$1,000 up front, then received monthly payments until the Kenyans’ “green cards” became permanent, a process that takes about two years.

The following U.S. citizens have been indicted with conspiring to enter a marriage to evade immigration laws, marriage fraud, and making false statements: Minnie Lou James, 26; Leon Joe Creighton, 56; Buffii Joshell Williams, 23; James Durell Caldwell, 38; Nathaniel Miller Jr., 28; Michael Charles Dixon, 36; Patricia Ann McNeal, 39; Bernard Dwayne Bowens, 24; Lisa Lynn Holmes, 34; Russell Townsley, 49; John Junior Watson, 24; and Kimberly Jefferson, 26. Ann Kessio, also a U.S. citizen, was charged with making a false statement.

The following Kenyan citizens have been indicted with conspiring to enter a marriage to evade immigration laws, marriage fraud, and making false statements: Matthew Kipchirchir Meli, 34; Irene Mayabi, 31; Lazaro Kipkurgat Sile, 29; Christine Kathini Otieno, 19; Peris Jebet Kilzoni, 55; James Reuel Ngugi, 28; Lydia Wanjiku Mutua, 26; and Stephen Kipkoech, 31. Irene Mayabi was also charged with falsely using a Social Security number. Veronica Metto, also a Kenyan citizen, has been charged with making false statements.

In addition to the 22 currently in custody, 10 additional people have been indicted for conspiring to enter a marriage to evade immigration laws, marriage fraud, and making false statements, but have not yet been arrested.

U.S. citizens not yet arrested include: Goldie Hicks, Jr., 42; Asellah Al-Hameed, 38; and Dana Brent Johnson, 46.

Kenyan citizens not yet arrested include: Salome Jeputk Tirop, 48; Vincent Domoir Shirao, 40; Lilly Marley Seronei, 27; Zipporah Jepkoech Chepkong'A, 54; Margaret Kigen, 34; Loxana Tangut, 27; and Jerry Koech, 37.

Conspiracy charges carry possible prison terms of five years; charges of making false statements carry a possible term of 15 years; and marriage fraud charges carry a possible term of 10 years. The false use of a Social Security number carries a possible penalty of five years. Each charge also has a possible fine of up to \$250,000.

The U.S. Marshals Service and Social Security Office of Inspector General assisted ICE in the arrests.

These charges are accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*